



October 16, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi,

The undersigned groups represent local education organizations dedicated to advocating for federal education policies that provide, support and enhance excellence in education in our nation's public schools. We thank you for your bipartisan efforts in working to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and hope that the important work of getting policy right will not be pushed to the side in a race against the clock.

On behalf of teachers, principals, school board members and school administrators, we all recognize the importance of improving current law, now four-years past due. We also recognize, more importantly, that we must get it right. As the national organizations representing the education stakeholders who will implement the bill, it is important that we have adequate opportunities to respond to any and all comprehensive proposals both in terms of individual provisions as well as the overall impact on student achievement, the direction of education, school district operations, and implications for fiscal burden. We share several concerns:

- **Teacher and Principal Evaluation:** While the bill recognizes the crucial role of being able to evaluate teachers and principals in a manner that provides professional feedback and helps improve student achievement, we are concerned about the capacity of states and local school districts to develop meaningful evaluation systems that do not become mechanisms for forced teacher and principal distribution. In addition, we need to prevent the mandating of evaluations that overemphasize standardized test scores at the expense of other important indicators of teachers and principal effectiveness. It should focus on efforts to reform and improve practice to help students learn.
- **Growth Models and Multiple Measures:** We were pleased to see the inclusion of growth models and multiple measures within the legislation, however, states will need more flexibility to design and implement robust multiple measures of student achievement. We believe that the actual measures and metrics for growth are best designed at the local level. We are concerned that this legislation represents a federal overreach and restricts the ability of state and local education agencies to build student achievement and evaluation systems.
- **Assessments:** Now ten years in to the NCLB approach of one-time snap-shot testing, we note that the proposed law, while opening a conversation around growth measures, is still heavily reliant on the idea of testing every child, every year through one single high-stakes summative assessment. We had hoped that ten years of experience and research would result in legislation that moved further away from reliance on standardized tests.
- **Turnaround Models:** We were pleased to see the inclusion of two additional turn-around models in the draft language, as well as the rural waiver. Unfortunately, the models are still highly prescriptive and four of the six are overly reliant on forced firing of teachers and principals. Further, we share concerns about the research base and efficacy of these models. We believe there is a way to support school turnaround in a thoughtful, research based way without limiting the ability of local school

districts to fully determine strategies that are focused on the needs of the impacted school and community.

We want to emphasize the importance of ensuring that the reauthorization process is both transparent and open, allowing stakeholders to participate without obstacle. We are concerned by the closed nature of the amendment process and ask that the committee consider any and all proposed amendments on their merit, and not dismiss them for political or timing reasons. We encourage the committee to continue working in a bipartisan manner to create the best policies for America's school children.

Thank you for your ongoing effort in reauthorizing ESEA. We welcome the opportunity to work with you as you slow the pace to support a meaningful dialogue around ESEA.

Sincerely,

American Association of School Administrators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
NASSP
National Education Association
National School Boards Association

CC: Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee members